

Good Posture and Self-Healing in a Wellness Paradigm

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Tough economic times and promises of health care reform are major causes of concern for the profession. With reform moving toward a "safety net" package of evidence-based protocols that will keep citizens alive, we cannot expect all aspects of our current practices to be a part of the new system, if at all. If chiropractors are included in such a basic health care plan, it will likely be for manipulative therapies only. With external events outside of our control, now is the time to plan for additional complementary ways of delivering wellness services to our patients.

I believe that adding posture training to our services can help address our patient and practice needs at this time. Over the past decade, I've been teaching a simple series of resting postures around the neutral spine, working critical angles in an open-chain, out-of-gravity protocol that can even be done in bed. I've pushed the table back and made room for teaching the resting postures in the office, and taught two public classes per week at a nearby studio that I rent by the hour. As my work progressed, I began billing my insured and PI cases on therapeutic exercise codes as a way of empowering self-responsibility for one's own active care. I have never been denied a penny of insurance billing for these services, which now include referrals from other physicians and attorneys.

I was also introduced to svaroopaa yoga over a decade ago and have been practicing it every day since. I've found in this gentle style what I believe to be an acceptable adjunct for both our patients and our practices. I was trained and certified to teach the foundational aspects of svaroopaa and would like to share some of my experience and insights relative to the role yoga techniques and postural training can play in furthering our wellness paradigm.

Posture Training Complements Traditional Chiropractic

How often have you heard the phrase, "We only use 10 percent of our brain"? Did you know that the statement applies to energy efficiency and good posture? The source of the cliché is about what occupies most of the brain, not the 10 percent. "Better than 90 percent of the brain's output is directed toward maintaining your body in its gravitational field. Therefore, the less energy one spends on one's posture, the more energy is available for healing, digestion, and thinking," according to the 1981 Nobel Prize winner for brain research, [Dr. Roger Sperry](#).¹ If we're only using 10 percent of our brain, it's because the other 90 percent is occupied proprioceptively.

[Dr. Ida P. Rolf](#), the founder of deep-tissue massage Rolfing and the theories of structural integration, agreed with Dr. Sperry in promoting "verticality" as a step in human evolution. In her essay, "The Vertical-Experiential Side to Human Potential," she states: "We assume that human beings are, as a species, evolving toward verticality."² We are all walking holding patterns reflecting the injuries we have sustained from life. We hold ourselves up out of the pain we've experienced and, left unattended, the nervous system sustains these patterns long after the initial injuries are over, accelerating degeneration and chronic pain. Chronic pain reflects both injuries and our maladaptations to those injuries.

Dr. Rolf proposed that bringing the human frame back into line with gravity was so powerful that it had adaptive evolutionary qualities. Sound familiar? She wrote, "This is the gospel of Structural Integration: When the body gets working appropriately, the force of gravity can flow through.

Then, spontaneously, the body heals itself."³

Relaxing chronic muscular tension is a physically uplifting experience. "Harmony with gravity enables that medium to become a supporting and energizing factor. As the fish is supported and lifted by the water, so we as human can be supported and lifted by gravity."⁴ We hold gravity in our bodies, lifting weight off of injuries and degenerative areas. As we learn to relax tonic muscles, a softening healing begins. As we learn to relax the interlacing short diagonal muscles surrounding the spine, a lengthening effect is achieved. As the larger diagonal strap muscles learn to relax, the lengthening of the spine continues, creating new space for healing to occur naturally.

But, just as brushing your teeth today doesn't resolve all dental problems, the uplifting effects of relaxing chronic musculature tension and learning to lean onto our bones for support will not reverse degenerative and disease processes overnight. It takes time and resilience to bring the aging body back toward healthful equilibrium. It cannot be done in a closed-chain, gravity-bearing environment; if it is to be accomplished by willful relaxation, it must be done out of gravity, incrementally, resting at the comfortable end ranges of spinal motion in a daily practice. By returning motion gradually to chronic tightness, we inhibit inappropriate problems of pain centralization, and return life and function to these injured areas of the body.

"Fortunate are they who have softened the rigidity within, for they gain the [universal healing power of Nature](#)."⁵ This quotation, revealed by Neil Douglas-Klotz, a biblical scholar of Jesus' original Aramaic language, may be seen as a summary of the history of yoga and meditation. In order to sit comfortably on earth, we must soften our inner rigidities. As we sit with the back straight in seated meditation, we begin to experience our inner tensions as discomfort, requiring yoga postures in order to soften them and allow a more comfortable seat. By learning to bring muscular relaxation to areas of chronic tension, potential energy is freed for deeply significant self-healing. By learning first, out of gravity, where these inner tensions exist in us, we can begin to relearn how to intentionally soften them. As proprioceptively tight postural muscles relax, the vertebra are allowed to return to their naturally efficient relationships; we self-adjust. This process shifts the locus of control of one's health to the individual, empowering further our self-healing potentials.

Over time, the ability to intentionally relax chronic areas of tension and pain allows us to bring the softening self-aligned body back into gravity more efficiently. Once we are able to sit in simple, easy-pose meditation for 30 or so minutes per day - upright with a straight but non-rigid spine, releasing weight into the supporting surface through the SITS bones, resting on our skeletal system - research suggests we may expect the following results:

1. Meditation creates a unique hypometabolic state in which the metabolism is in an even deeper state of rest than during sleep. During sleep, oxygen consumption drops by 8 percent, but during meditation, it drops by 10 percent to 12 percent.
2. Meditation is the only activity that reduces blood lactate, a marker of stress and anxiety.
3. The calming hormones melatonin and serotonin are increased by meditation, and the stress hormone cortisol is reduced.
4. Meditation has a profound effect upon three key indicators of aging: hearing ability, blood

pressure and vision of close objects.

5. Long-term meditators experience 80 percent less heart disease and 50 percent less cancer than nonmeditators.
6. Meditators secrete more of the youth-related hormone DHEA as they age than nonmeditators. Meditating 45-year-old males have an average of 23 percent more DHEA than nonmeditators, and meditating females have an average of 47 percent more. This helps decrease stress, heighten memory, preserve sexual function, and control weight.
7. 75 percent of insomniacs are able to sleep more normally when they meditate.
8. 34 percent of people with chronic pain significantly [reduce medication when they begin meditating](#).⁶
9. Regular meditation practice may [slow age-related and chronic pain shrinkage of the frontal cortex](#).⁷

Posture Training Fits the Evolving Wellness Paradigm

There are complex physiological mechanisms at work in both degenerative and disease disequilibrium, and in their rehabilitation. But by keeping the restorative practice simple, progress can be achieved by nearly everyone. My pre- and post-testing using Oswestry and visual pain scales register significant improvements in all subjects. Using more appropriate testing procedures will show even more evidence of self-healing, and possibly pave the way for inclusion into national wellness plans.

Teaching an active care regimen for good posture fits exactly into the wellness trajectory of health care reform, and is an excellent complement to the subluxation based practice. We need to demystify structural self-healing for patients by providing simple explanations and accessible protocols that can be positively experienced early in the active care process. And for best results and continued patient education, we need to incorporate the practice into our own daily routine. We cannot teach what we have not learned for ourselves. Essentially, the process of deep relaxation around the neutral spine unleashes internal self-healing forces that are best understood experientially.

By teaching patients how to rest in a few simple, accessible and effective resting postures, innate forces of healing bring the body into a more efficient relationship to gravity, preparing it for deeper levels of self-healing. This is a protocol that can serve both patients and our evolving practices in an evolving wellness paradigm.

References

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